

Seven Valleys: Tablet study outline

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[?]

Name of Tablet in Arabic or Persian: Haft-Vádí

Translation into English: Seven Valleys

This is one of the most widely-available and earliest-translated of the works of Bahá'u'lláh. It was first translated into English by Alí Kuli Khán

in 1906 and reprinted frequently. A revised trans. published in 1945, done by Khán and his daughter Marzieh Gail, is to this day the standard trans.

Hippolyte Dreyfus also trans. it into French directly from the Persian a year before Kuli Khán's English version, in 1905, with Julie Chanler then re-translating it from the French into English in 1936.

There is a small but growing amount of material on the Seven Valleys. After Taherzadeh, the most complete treatment is Stephen Lambden's "The Seven Valleys of Bahá'u'lláh: A Provisional Translation with Occasional Notes, pt. 1," in Bahá'í Studies Bulletin 6:2-3 (Feb. 1992), pages 26-74, where the first paragraph is translated literalistically. As this article consists of only one paragraph of trans. and 48 pages of notes, it can be seen that a full annotated treatment of the Seven Valleys could be over 1,000 pages! The second most complete discussion is by John Walbridge in Sacred Acts, Sacred Space, Sacred Time, 150-157 and 287-288.

Bahá'u'lláh: King of Glory treats it only briefly, on pages 161-163.

Many other texts and essays are online at Bahá'í-library.org.

General readings on Bahá'í mysticism, with occasional reference to the Seven Valleys, include the following. The only full study of mysticism, though a basic one, is Glenn A. Shook's *Mysticism, Science, and Revelation*. Rúhi Afán compared Christian and Islamic mysticism with the Bahá'í approach to the subject in *Mysticism and the Bahá'í Revelation: A Contrast*. These are both rather old works. More recently, Farnaz Ma'sumian wrote a short introduction to Bahá'í mysticism, "Mysticism and the Bahá'í Faith," in *Deepen*, 6.3 (1995), online at <http://bahai-library.com/articles>. Moojan Momen presents some findings of medicine and psychology on the mystic state and their relation to Bahá'u'lláh's mysticism in his "The Psychology of Mysticism and its Relationship to the Bahá'í Faith," in *Bahá'í Studies Bulletin*, 2.4 (1984). Jack McLean discusses the mystical aspects of spirituality in *Dimensions of Spirituality*, especially 82-88. A work of fiction which may be of interest is Bruce Wells' *From Discontent: the Biography of a Mystic*. William S. Hatcher presents some philosophical aspects of mysticism in "Myths, Models, and Mysticism," in *Logic and Logos: Essays on Science, Religion, and Philosophy*.

Significance of Name:

In the words of the preface by Robert Gulick, in `Attar's *Mantiqu't-Tayr* (Language/Conference of the birds), "the journey of the soul is traced through Seven Valleys: Search, Love, Knowledge, Detachment, Unification, Bewilderment, and Annihilation," and "Bahá'u'lláh employed a similar, although not identical, pattern in His Persian Seven Valleys which delineates the seven stages of progress of the soul toward the object of its being."

Tablet was revealed in: Persian

Name of Recipient

Shaykh Muhyi'd-Din, a Sufi of the Qadiri order and religious judge (Qadi) of Kháníqi, a town on the southern edge of Iraqi Kurdistan.

Reason for Revelation of the Tablet:

Walbridge writes that Shaykh Muhyi'd-Din had written to Bahá'u'lláh asking about the meaning of certain Persian mystical poems. From the context of the Seven Valleys, one can glean that Muhyi'd-Din had also given "his own views on the classical Sufi topics of the stages of mystical life and the hidden meanings of the letters of the Arabic alphabet," esp. in the word "sparrow." Since the Seven Valleys contains two postscripts, one on steadfastness and the other on "sparrow," it is possible that the Shaykh may have asked his questions of Bahá'u'lláh in two or three different letters.

Date of Revelation:

Since all we know is that the Tablet was revealed "after His return from Sulaymaniyyih," all we know for certain is that it was between 1856-1863.

Place of Revelation:

Baghdad

Other Tablets revealed at about the same time:

In *God Passes By*, pages 140-141, Shoghi Effendi writes that the "Four Valleys... the Tablet of the Holy Mariner...the Tablet of the Maiden...the Súrih of Patience...a commentary on the Letters prefixed to the Súrihs of the Qur'an...His interpretation of the letter Vav...the Tablet of the City of Unity...the Sahífiy-i-Shattiyyih...Musibat-i-Hurúfát-i-'Aliyat...Tafsír-i-Hu...Javáhiru'l-Asrár...and a host of other writings, in the form of epistles, odes, homilies, specific Tablets, commentaries and prayers...poured forth from the 'Abode of Peace' [Baghdad]."

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

Style: This tablet seems to contain both tones, that of "command and authority" and also that of "servitude, meekness and supplication." While it is mostly in written in the former, there are places in which Bahá'u'lláh

speaks with the tone of servitude, as in p. 26: "...this Servant regardeth Himself as utterly lost and as nothing..."

Subject: This tablet seems to contain many subjects, such as "Writings dealing with interpretation of the old Scriptures, religious beliefs and doctrines of the past"; "Mystical Writings"; "Tablets dealing with subjects of learning and knowledge, divine philosophy, mysteries of creation, medicine, alchemy, etc."; and "Tablets exhorting men to education, goodly character and divine virtues."

Genre: "Essay or book revealed as a letter to an individual."

Voice of Tablet: [?]

Bahá'u'lláh

Outline Contents of Tablet:

Invocation: Praise of God and Muhammad, allusions to the Báb

Introduction: Acknowledgment of the Shaykh's letter and discussion of the Sufi notion of multiple stages through which one must pass to reach God.

Valley 1: One must search and purify the heart from distracting desires.

Valley 2: Love (here, "ishq," or "passionate, maddening love") focusses desire on God and burns away the self.

Valley 3: Knowledge, or understanding, teaches one to see God's guiding hand — providence — everywhere.

Valley 4: The correct perception of God's unity (Tawhíd) teaches one to see God's being everywhere, but reject monism and pantheism.

Valley 5: In the station of contentment one needs nothing but God.

Valley 6: Here the mystic is rendered "insane" (majnun) by the awareness of God: this relates to the state of bewilderment and amazement experienced by many mystics, what New Age thought terms "crazy wisdom."

Valley 7: This is the state of annihilation of self (fana') in God, but not an existential union: the essences of God's self and the mystic's self remain distinct, in contrast to what appears to be a complete union at the end of `Attar's book.

Conclusion: One must obey the law: this relates to the split in Sufism between the Sufis who believe that, having "experienced" God directly, one did not need the outward trappings of divine law (shari`ah), vs. the Sufis who taught that no one, not even the mystic, can disregard the law.

Postscript 1: Bahá'u'lláh alludes to the dangers He is in and exhorts the

Shaykh to remain steadfast.

Postscript 2: Bahá'u'lláh gives an acronymic reading of
"gunjishk,"
"sparrow."

Comment on relation of Tablet to other Tablets:

While this bears many similarities to the Four Valleys, the two works
are distinct and do not bear any direct relation.

Biography or bio

note of the recipient of the Tablet:

A one-paragraph bio of Shaykh Muhyi'd-Din can be found in John Waldbridge,
Sacred

Acts, Sacred Space, Sacred Time, 150:

The Seven Valleys was written in Baghdad in response to the questions of Shaykh
Muhyi'd-Din, a Sufi of the Qadiri order. He was the son of Shaykh Hasan of
Gilzarda and became Qadi (religious judge) of Kháníqin, a town on the southern
edge of Iraqi Kurdistan. Later, Shaykh Muhyi'd-Din succeeded to his father's
position as a religious leader in Gilzarda. Shaykh Muhyi'd-Din had written
books on Sufism and, at about the time that he wrote to Bahá'u'lláh, he gave
up his position and set out wandering from place to place until his death in
Kirkuk in 1877. He may have been one of the Kurdish Sufis whom Bahá'u'lláh
had met in Sulaymaniyyih.

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