

Sprinkling from a Cloud: Tablet study outline

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Name of Tablet in Arabic or Persian: Rashh-i-`Ama

Translation into English: "Sprinkling from a Cloud," often roughly translated as "Sprinkling of the Cloud of Unknowing." This title is only an approximation of the Persian, but it might be a good one because it recalls the famous Christian work *The Cloud of Unknowing,* an anonymous mystical work from fourteenth-century Britain which had a strong influence on later Christian mystics. While there almost certainly is no connection between the two texts, their similarity is interesting. The Christian *Cloud of Unknowing* says that the "cloud of unknowing" which separates us from God can't be penetrated by the intellect, but only by love. However, God sometimes bestows mystical inspiration which allows humans a glimpse of His secrets. This could be seen as being analogous to Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet, which calls humanity to recognize the "divine outpouring" of God's revelation.

A provisional translation by Ramin Neshati is online at Baháí-library.org/provisionals/rashh-ama.html. A provisional translation by Stephen Lambden also exists, but it is not online. In his introduction to his own translation, Lambden wrote:

Bahá'u'lláh's Rash-i `ama' is a Persian poem of 19 couplets which takes its name from the opening words of its first hemistich. Widely regarded by Bahá'ís as the earliest extant example of divine revelation (Bahá'í scripture) it was composed during the time of its author's imprisonment in the *Siyah Chal* ("Black Pit") dungeon in Tehran; that is, at some time during the latter half of the year 1852 CE (= early 1269 AH). It was, Bahá'u'lláh in his later writings has stated, during the "year nine" (= 1269 AH/ Oct. 15th 1852 —> October 4th 1853) that he underwent profound mystical experiences and resolved to attempt to regenerate the demoralised Bábí community.

It seems likely, as most Bahá'í writers have maintained, that the Rash-i `ama' is expressive of Bahá'u'lláh's own assumption of a leading role within the Bábí community. To what extent, however, Bahá'u'lláh therein alludes to the theophanic status he later explicitly claimed (from the early 1860's CE) is not entirely clear bearing in mind the extravagant claims made by many leading Bábís in the 1850's, the poetic nature of this work, and the possibility that he is representing himself as a channel through which the celestial and eschatological Bábí spirit flows. He certainly at this stage makes no explicit claim to be "Him whom God would make manifest" (man yuzhiruhu'lláh, the expected Bábí messiah) and could be understood to be representing himself as a leading Bábí rather than claiming to be the inaugurator of a new (though at this stage secret) religious dispensation. One would probably not be going too far if one supposed that in the

Rash-i `ama' the `messianic secret' of Bahá'u'lláh is all but divulged; though in cryptic, esoteric terms.

Significance of Name: The name is taken from a phrase in the first line of the poem. It likely refers to the actual outpouring of Revelation, a "sprinkling" from "the Cloud of Unknowing," which might be a reference to God. Juan Cole has discussed this tablet in a fair degree of detail in "Bahá'u'lláh and the Naqshbandi Sufis," in *_Studies in Bábí and Bahá'í History, vol. 2: From Iran East to West_*. Here he explains that the Arabic term 'ama literally means "cloud," and its theological significance derives from the hadith in which Muhammad, upon being asked "Where was our Lord before He created the heavens and the earth," replied "In a cloud, above which was air and below which was air." The title could then mean "sprinklings," i.e. revelation, from the "cloud," i.e. God. The phrase "of unknowing" is implied, not explicit, in the title.

Tablet was revealed in: Persian

Reason for Revelation of the Tablet: To announce the glad-tidings of the release of spiritual energies; to disclose for the first time the advent of the "Day of God"; to identify this Day with the Day foretold in Islam when the saying "I am He' would be fulfilled.

Date of Revelation: Since the Tablet was revealed in the Sáyáh-Chál, it can be dated to sometime between August and December, 1852.

Place of Revelation: The Sáyáh-Chál dungeon in Tehran.

Other Tablets revealed at about the same time: Taherzadeh writes that this poem was Bahá'u'lláh's first Tablet and the only one revealed "in the land of His birth," but by "the land of His birth" he must be referring to Tehran, not the whole of Iran. Shoghi Effendi, describing Badasht in *_God Passes By_* p. 32, writes "on each of the twenty-two days of His sojourn in that hamlet He revealed a Tablet, which was chanted in the presence of the assembled believers." Since Badasht is in Persia, and since this conference took place circa June-July 1848, we must conclude that Rashh-i-'Amá was not the first Tablet Bahá'u'lláh revealed, nor the first He revealed in Persia. Rather, it is the earliest *extant* tablet.

Other tablets revealed around the same time include a prayer revealed within the following few months as Bahá'u'lláh travelled to Iraq. As well, *_Call to Remembrance_*, pp. 69-70, identifies the prayer from *_Prayers and Meditations_* pp. 278-279 as being a "Prayer from the Sáyáh-Chál."

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

Style: Tone of command and authority.

Subject: Writings in which laws and ordinances have been enjoined for this age and laws of the past abrogated; Mystical Writings.

Genre: Poem

Voice of Tablet: [?] Bahá'u'lláh speaks with His voice here. Taherzadeh writes: "In every line He extolls the glory of God..." It is in *other* Tablets that He speaks with the voice of God.

Outline Contents of Tablet (if possible):

Announcing release of spiritual energies; attributing these energies to Himself; disclosing advent of "Day of God" and associate it with Himself; identifying this Day with the Day foretold in Islam when the saying "I am He" would be fulfilled.

List the principal themes of the Tablet:

The principal theme is joyful proclamation: the announcement that the Day of God has arrived, the Day when "He is He" becomes "I am He" in the new, great Revelation. The fact that such a joyous Tablet was revealed in the midst of such incredible suffering also demonstrates the vitality and vigor of Bahá'u'lláh's spirit and the import of His new revelation.

Tablet's relationship to other tablets:

Earliest extant Tablet; only one revealed in Tehran; first clear — if encoded — announcement of His revelation.

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