

Tablet of the Branch: Tablet study outline

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Name of Tablet in Arabic or Persian:

Súriy-i-Ghusn

Translation into English:

Súrih (Tablet) of the Branch. While a complete authorized translation is lacking, we do have a few portions of the Tablet authoritatively translated, much secondary discussion, and even an old provisional translation published by the Bahá'í Publishing Trust.

Extracts of this Tablet, translated by Shoghi Effendi, were published in *World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* 134-135 (passage reprinted in Taherzadeh's *Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh* vol. 1, 135). The Tablet is also discussed here and there, pages 133-138. 'Abdu'l-Bahá Himself explained some verses of the Tablet of the Branch in a Tablet to Hájí Mírzá Haydar-'Ali, part of which is trans. in *ibid.* 138. The Tablet is also mentioned in *God Passes By* 177, and a couple of phrases translated in *ibid.*, 242. A complete provisional translation was published in *Bahá'í World Faith* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1966 [third printing]), pp. 204-207. This is online at Baháí-library.org/provisionals/tablet.branch.html.

The Tablet is discussed in quite a few places. Wendi Momen offers a definition of it in *A Basic Bahá'í Dictionary*, 218. *Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh* discusses it in vol. 2, 388-89, 394-95. Taherzadeh's *The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh* cites this Tablet and its significance frequently: 104, 136, 219, 267, 430. John Hatcher's *Ocean of His Words* summarizes the Tablet and its significance on pages 154-56. A brief but interesting anecdote about 'Abdu'l-Bahá and this Tablet (see below, at "Bio notes" at end, for excerpt) can be found in Ramona Allen Brown, *Memories of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, 15. Balyuzi's *Bahá'u'lláh: King of Glory* mentions this Tablet on page 250 and discusses the station of 'Abdu'l-Bahá pages 420-23. He also mentions this Tablet and the station of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in *'Abdu'l-Bahá, Centre of the Covenant*, on pages 22-23, 129, 220, and 270. Though making no mention of this particular Tablet, 'Abdu'l-Bahá also discusses the nature of the Covenant and His place in it in *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, 209-216. For commentary on the station of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and his designation as the "Most Great Branch," see the back of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, notes 66 and 145, and Mírzá Abu'l-Fadl's *The Bahá'í Proofs* 108-110.

Significance of Name:

Bahá'u'lláh referred to 'Abdu'l-Bahá variously as "the Trust of God," "this sacred and glorious being," "this Branch of Holiness," "the Limb of the Law of God," "this sublime, this blessed, this mighty, this exalted Handiwork," "the most great Favor," "the most perfect bounty," "the Master," "the Mystery of God," and "Ghusnu'lláhu'l-A'zam." The latter is, in the uninflected Arabic, Ghusn Alláh A`zam: the Greatest (al-`Azam) Branch (Ghusn) of God (Alláh).

This tablet was written to unveil the station of Abdu'l-Bahá, the Greatest Branch and Mystery of God.

Tablet was revealed in: Arabic

Name of Recipient: Mírzá Alí-Riday-i-Mustawfi of Khurasan

Reason for Revelation of the Tablet:

To describe and foreshadow the future station of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. In the paraphrased words of Shoghi Effendi, quoted in Balyuzi's *Bahá'u'lláh: King of Glory*, 420, this Tablet and others like it bequeath the Covenant to posterity, unequivocally disclose the rank and station of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and shield and support the appointed Center of Bahá'u'lláh's Faith.

Date of Revelation:

The *Basic Bahá'í Chronology*, 78, places this Tablet in the year mid 1867 - mid 1868.

Place of Revelation:

Adrianople

Other Tablets revealed at about the same time:

Súriy-i-Mulúk, Lawh-i-Sultán, Lawh-i-Napulyan, Súriy-i-Hajj I and II, Kitáb-i-Badí, et al.

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

Style: Tablet with the tone of command and authority

Subject: Writings in which laws and ordinances have been enjoined for this age and laws of the past abrogated; Tablets exhorting men to education, goodly character and divine virtues.

Genre: Letter to an individual

Voice of Tablet: [?]

Bahá'u'lláh

Outline Contents of Tablet:

This summary derives from the provisional translation cited above.

Bahá'u'lláh opens by saying that the revelation has descended from the Heavens, such that the faithful will rejoice and the deniers will suffer. He warns us not to prefer our own selves above God, for we must be open to the revelation and receive it like the choice wine of life. We must enter the shelter of the Word of God.

The eternal presence of God has branched from the Most Great Ocean; the sacred temple has branched from the Sadratu'l-Muntaha. We must seek shelter in each. The branch of command has sprung forth from the tree of God's will, and we must draw unto it to partake of its wisdom. This word which has gone forth from the Will of God is a sign of His greatness, such that His creation shall praise him

and His Manifestation. We must appreciate His bounty and not be veiled from His manifestation in the temple of man. Those who withhold themselves from the shelter of its branch are indeed lost.

In a future day, there will be no shelter except under the shelter of God's name, the forgiving, and no refuge save in the command of God. Bringing one soul to the Cause is like bringing all people to the Cause. We must heed the teachings of the Writings, and spread the Writings among all people. We must not quarrel. We must give the thirsty to drink from the chalice of the revelation, and read the Writings to those we find with attentive ears. If we find neither, we shall abandon them to themselves — we must not spread the Faith where there is ignorance and it is not accepted. For if we read all the verses of God to a deaf man, would he ever hear?

Thus, Bahá'u'lláh concludes, He has delivered unto us some jewels of wisdom and guidance so that we may find our Lord. Those who remain faithful to the Cause of God are blessed.

List the principal themes of the Tablet:

- * The appointment of `Abdu'l-Bahá as Center of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant and Interpreter of His Words
- * The explanation of the Covenant
- * How the believers can attain a "lofty" station
- * Why the believers must not deprive themselves of the "shadow of the Branch"
- * That it is incumbent upon every soul to teach the Faith according to his ability.

Tablet's relationship to other tablets:

A few other key Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh reaffirm the themes of the Súriy-i-Ghusn and reiterate His appointment of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, such as "The Will and Testament of Bahá'u'lláh," the "Kitáb-i-Ahd," and the Kitáb-i-Aqdas.

Biography or bio note of the recipient of the Tablet:

Following are a few disconnected notes, many of which could be bases for further study:

Ramona Allen Brown's *Memories of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, page 15, includes this fascinating anecdote:

"When the Master went to New York, Lua traveled with the group. She told me that it was in New York City that 'Abdu'l-Bahá first taught the American Bahá'ís about the protecting power of obedience to the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh. There, on June 19, 1912, when the friends were gathered in the basement of His house, the translation of the "Tablet of the Branch" was read for the first time in this country. It is for this reason that New York is

called the 'City of the Covenant.'

On that day 'Abdu'l-Bahá was upstairs sitting while Juliet Thompson painted His portrait. Lua was seated nearby, and Juliet said to her: ' I think the Master is asleep! Perhaps we should let Him sleep.' With those words 'Abdu'l-Bahá opened His eyes and in a powerful voice said to Lua 'I appoint you the herald of the Covenant. Go down and tell the people I am the Center of the Covenant!' The whole world must have shaken at those electrifying words. Lua hesitated and with tears streaming down her face said, 'O Lord, not I! O my Lord, recreate me!' He repeated His command to her, and she went down to proclaim to the friends the station of 'Abdu'l-Bahá."

The above anecdote is preserved in Juliet Thompson's diary, as well. See, for example, *Lua Getsinger: Herald of the Covenant*, 156-157, or Thompson's *Diary*, 311-12.

World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, 135-6 mentions and translates extracts from at least 5 other tablets and prayers of Bahá'u'lláh for 'Abdu'l-Bahá. *God Passes By*, 242 mentions another tablet written in Edirne regarding 'Abdu'l-Bahá, but addressed to Hájí Muhammad Ibráhím-i-Khalíl.

Mírzá Alí-Riday-i-Mustawfi of Khurasan was a faithful Bahá'í who was not only prominent in government circles but also was always helpful to the poor. He had been taught the Faith by Mullá Husayn, and had provided horses and money for Mullá Husayn and his companions when they traveled to remote areas to teach the Cause.

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