

THE TABLET OF THE SEVEN QUESTIONS (*LAWH-I HAFT PURSISH*) OF BAHĀ'U'LLĀH: AN INTRODUCTION AND PROVISIONAL TRANSLATION.

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The *Tablet of the Seven Questions (Lawh-i haft pursish)* was revealed by Bahā'u'llāh in reply to a petition of Ustād Javān Mard, a prominent Zoroastrian in Yazd who converted to the new Faith. Ustād Javān Mard served on the Zoroastrian Council of Yazd and was, for a time, its secretary. He was also the principal of the first Zoroastrian school in Yazd. It is reported that he was the first Zoroastrian convert who, after his death, was buried, rather than left in the local Dakhma ("Tower of Silence") -- as is the practice among Zoroastrians.

It can be surmised that the Tablet was revealed some time between 1876 CE when Ustād Javān Mard -- whilst a student of Mīrzā Abu'l Fadl in Tih-rān -- first came across the Bahā'ī Faith, and 1882/3 CE when large scale conversion from within the Zoroastrian community took place in Yazd. Within the tablet, through a play on Ustād Javān Mard's name, he is addressed as *Shīr Mard*, "Lion of a Man" and "Lion amongst men" (*Shīr mardumān*); that is, one lion-like, a manly, courageous soul.

Ustād Javān Mard's petition contained seven questions on eschatological, theological and social themes. Unfortunately, it would seem that the text of the petition is not extant. Some of the questions are repeated in the text of the Tablet in part (questions 4, 6) or in full (questions 1, 3) whilst others appear to be a paraphrase of the original enquiries (questions 2, 5, 7).

The Tablet, except for a brief Arabic supplication (at the end of the reply to question 3), is in Persian. Like other Tablets revealed for Zoroastrians, the Persian employed is fairly pure containing fewer distinctly Arabic terms than is the case in many other Persian writings of Bahā'u'llāh.

In 1899 most of the Persian text of the Tablet, together with a Russian translation by the soldier and orientalist, Alexander G. Tumansky (d. Istanbul 1920), appeared in *Zapiski Imperatorskoy Akademii Nauk S. Peterburg (Mémoires de L'Académie Impériale des Sciences de St.-Pétersbourg)* 8th series, Vol.3, No. 6, (1899), pp. 100-102+105-108. The Persian text printed here commences with the first question but does not contain the introduction -- there are only very minor variant readings compared with the text printed in *Majmū'a-yi alwāh-i mubāraka ḥadrat-i Bahā'u'llāh*.

Two portions of this Tablet were translated into English by Shoghi Effendi and included in his general letter to the West of 1941, *The Promised Day is Come*. The Arabic supplication contained in this Tablet has been translated into English by the Research Department at the World Centre at the request of the Universal House of Justice. These sections have been indicated in the text [PDC & RD].

In replying to the seventh question reference is made by Bahā'u'llāh to a work by Mīrzā 'Abu'l Fadl, *Sharh-i shajara nāma-yi mubāraka* ("Commentary on the Blessed Genealogical Tree"), later published in Bombay as a pamphlet, in which he delineated the ancestry of Bahā'u'llāh.¹

There are a number of themes in this Tablet which appear to have been the common concern of many early Zoroastrian converts to the Faith and seem to have played an important role in their conversion:²

- A common experience of persecution with early Bahá'ís (Question 3)
- Eschatological concerns (Questions 5 and 6)
- Bahā'u'llāh as the fulfilment of prophecy (Question 4)
- The importance to Zoroastrians of the Persian Language (Question 1)
- The genealogy of Bahā'u'llāh (Question 7)
- Emphasis on universality of the Bahā'ī message (Question 2)
- Kindness and tolerance (Question 2)

¹ For further information on this see H.M. Balyuzi, *Eminent Bahá'ís in the time of Bahá'u'lláh* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1985) Chapter 23 and Appendix One below.

² For further information on Zoroastrian conversions see Mary Boyce, *Zoroastrians Their Religious Beliefs and Practices* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), page 212; Adib Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh* vol 3 (Oxford: George Ronald, 1983), Chapter 11.

THE TABLET OF SEVEN QUESTIONS, PROVISIONAL TRANSLATION ¹

In the Name of the Speaker Who uttereth Wisdom.

Praised be the Sanctified Lord Who hath illumined the world through the effulgence of the Sun of His Providence. From the letter "B" the Most-Great Ocean (*bahr-i a'zam*) hath appeared and from the letter "H" the Pure Divinity (Ipseity, *huwīya*) hath been made manifest. He is that Almighty One Whose purpose the power of men can never frustrate; nor can the hosts of kings hinder His Utterance. Thy letter was received and seen; therefrom did We hear thy call. Therein were the pearls of love hidden and the mysteries of loving-kindness treasured. We beseech the Incomparable Sovereign to confirm thee in aiding His Cause and to assist thee in guiding to the Water of Life such as are sore-thirst in the wilderness of ignorance. In every respect is He One Mighty and Powerful. We now reply to that which thou hast enquired of the Ocean of Knowledge and the Day-Star of Wisdom.

The initial question: "Firstly, in what tongue should God, the Peerless, be worshipped and in what direction is it befitting to turn?"

The beginning of all things is the worship of God which followeth upon the recognition of Him. Sanctified must be the eye that seeketh to recognise Him and sanctified likewise must be the tongue that uttereth His praise in this Day in which the faces of the learned and the wise are oriented in His direction – nay rather, every direction is itself inclined towards Him.

O Shīr-Mard! I beseech God that thou be a man of action and, by the power of the Omnipotent arise and say: "*O high-priests [dastūrān]! Ears have been given you that they may hearken to the mystery of Him Who is the Self-Dependent, and eyes that they may behold Him. Wherefore flee ye? The Incomparable Friend [Dūst-i yik-tā] is manifest. He speaketh that wherein lieth salvation. Were ye, O high priests, to discover the perfume of the rose garden of understanding ye would seek none other but Him, and would recognise, in His new vesture, the*

¹ The text translated below is that printed in *Majmū'a-yi alwāh-i mubāraka hadrat-i Bahā'u'llāh* (Cairo, 1920/ Rep. Wilmette, Illinois: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1978) pp. 240-248. Reference has also been made other texts including that printed in *Daryā-yi dānish* (New Delhi: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1985) pp: 65-71. I am grateful to Stephen Lambden and Khazeh Fananapazir for advice in the course of making this provisional translation.

All Wise and Peerless One, and would turn your eyes from the world and all who seek it, and would arise to help Him" [PDC:77]

The second question is regarding religion (*kīsh*) and tradition (*āyīn*).

The religion of God hath, in this Day, been made manifest. He Who is the Possessor of the World is come. His religion is righteousness and His tradition forbearance. This religion bestoweth eternal life and this tradition leadeth men to the world of true detachment. Therein is all religion and tradition encompassed. Receive it and cling ye thereto.

The third question: "In what manner should we deal with the people of this Day who have segregated themselves into separate religions -- each regarding their own religion (*kīsh*) and tradition (*āyīn*) as superior and more exalted than others -- so that we may not suffer at their hands and tongues?"

O Lion amongst Men (*Shīr-Mardumān*)! Regard suffering, when endured in the path of His Highness the Omnipotent One [*ḥadrat-i yazdān*], as comfort itself. Endured in His path every pain is a mighty remedy, every bitterness sweetness itself, and every abasement an exaltation. If men were to truly seek and to understand, they would readily offer up their lives for the sake of this suffering for it is the key to hidden treasures. If outwardly it is abhorrent, inwardly it is well-pleasing. We accept and affirm that which thou sayest. The people of this Day, bereft of the splendour of the Sun of Justice, have considered Him their enemy. Shouldst thou wish to be free from suffering, recite this utterance (*bayān*) which hath emanated from the Pen of the All-Merciful:

"O my God, O my God! I testify to Thy oneness and Thy singleness. I beg of Thee, O Thou Who art the Possessor of Names and Fashioner of Heavens, by the influence of Thine exalted Word and the potency of Thy Supreme Pen, to aid me with the standards of Thy power and might, and to protect me from the mischief of Thine enemies, who have broken Thy Covenant and Testament [RD]." Thou verily, art the Almighty, the Most Powerful."

This invocation (*dhikr*), like unto a mighty fortress and a powerful host, shall protect and deliver thee.

The fourth question: "Our books have announced the [future] appearance of Shāh Bahrām with manifold signs for the guidance of mankind..."

O friend! "Whatsoever hath been announced in the Books hath been revealed and made clear. From every direction the signs have been manifested. The Omnipotent One [*yazdān*] is calling, in this Day, and announcing the appearance of the Supreme Heaven [*mīnū-yi a'zam*]" [PDC:77]. The world is illumined by the lights of His appearance, yet rare indeed are the eyes endowed with insight. Ask of the one true God to bestow insight upon His servants. Insight leadeth to wisdom (*dānā'ī*) and hath ever been the cause of salvation. Keeness of wisdom (*dānā'ī-yi khirad*) is derived from insightful vision. Were the peoples of the world to gaze with their own eyes, they would see that the world is, in this Day, illumined with a new radiance. Say: the Day-Star of Wisdom (*khurshīd-i dānā'ī*) is manifest and the Sun of Knowledge (*āftāb-i dānish*) evident. Happy the one who attaineth thereunto, who seeth clearly and hath recognised Him.

The fifth question concerned the bridge of *Sirāt*, "paradise" (*bihisht*) and "hell" (*dūzakh*).

Verily, the Messengers of God have appeared in truth and have spoken the truth. That which the Envoy of the Omnipotent One (*pīk-i yazdān*) hath announced, hath come to pass and shall continue to be made manifest. The world of existence is established upon the basis of reward and punishment. Heaven and hell have ever been and continue to be confirmed by knowledge and wisdom, for the existence of reward and punishment requireth them. In the first station and on the foremost level paradise, signifieth the attainment of the good pleasure of the True One. Whosoever attaineth His good pleasure is considered and reckoned as being among the denizens of the most exalted paradise. Upon the ascension of this soul, such a person shall attain that which mere pen and ink are powerless to describe. The bridge of *Sirāt*, "the balance" (*mīzān*), "paradise" (*jannat*), "hell-fire" (*nār*) and whatsoever hath been mentioned and written in the Divine Books, is clear and evident to those with seeing eyes and to those whose gaze is directed towards the Most Great Beauty (*manzar-i akbar* lit. 'greatest vista/panorama' = Bahā'u'llāh). At the moment of the manifestation and appearance of the lights of the Day-Star of mystery, all peoples occupy the same station. Then, at the time when the True One maketh a declaration, such as give ear and attain faith are reckoned among the inmates of paradise (*jannat*). Likewise, the bridge of *Sirāt*, "the balance" and whatsoever hath been mentioned regarding the Day of resurrection (*rūz-i rastkhīz*) hath now been realized and come to pass for the Day of this Manifestation (*yaum-i zuhūr*) is the Day of the Greatest Resurrection (*yaum-i*

rastkhīz-i akbar). We cherish the hope that, aided by the Wine of Divine Revelation and the Fount of Lordly Bounty, thou shouldst attain the station of mystical insight and realization and witness, both outwardly and inwardly, all that which thou hast mentioned.

The sixth question: "After relinquishing the body and the departure of the soul to the other realm ..."

In this regard, a while ago there appeared from the Pen of Divine Knowledge that which sufficeth such as are possessed of vision and bestoweth the greatest felicity upon the learned. We, in very truth, proclaim that the departed soul deriveth happiness from goodly deeds; the effects of charity and acts of generosity offered in the path of God revert back to that soul.

The seventh question is concerning the matter of the name, lineage and pure ancestry [of Bahā'u'llāh]...

Regarding this matter, 'Abu'l-Fadl-i Gulpāygānī -- upon him be My Glory -- hath written, based on the Heavenly Books, that which bestoweth knowledge and increaseth understanding. The Faith of God is endowed with power and might. Erelong that which the Tongue hath uttered will be made manifest. We beseech God to empower thee to render assistance unto Him. He is the All-Wise, the Most Powerful. Shouldst thine honour obtain and peruse the Sūrih-yi Ra'īs and the Sūrih-yi Mulūk, thou wouldst find thyself no longer in need of that whereof thou hast asked and wouldst arise to render service to the Cause of God in such wise that neither the oppression of the whole world, nor the power of its nations, would prevent thee from rendering assistance to the Sovereign of Eternity.

I beseech God to confirm thee in that which shall exalt and immortalize thy name. Strive, perchance thou mayest obtain the aforementioned Tablets [Sūrahs] and acquire therefrom a portion of the pearls of wisdom and utterance which have appeared from the treasury of the Pen of the All-Merciful. Glory be upon thee and upon all who have remained constant, steadfast, firm and faithful.

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بنام گوینده دانا

ستایش پاک یزدان را سزاوار که از روشنی
 آفتاب بخشش جهانرا روشن نمود * از با بحر اعظم
 هویدا * و از ها هوویه بخته * اوست توانائیکه توانائی
 مردم روزگار او را از خواست خود باز ندارد *
 و لشکرهای پادشاهان از گفتارش منع نماید *
 نامه ات رسید دیدیم * و ندایترا شنیدیم * در نامه
 لالی محبت مکنون و اسرار مودت مخزون * از داور
 بیهمال میطلبیم ترا تأیید فرماید بر نصرت امرش *
 و توفیق بخشد تا تشنگان دشت نادانی را با آب زندگانی
 برسانی * اوست برهر امری قادر و توانا * آنچه
 از دریای دانائی و خورشید بینائی سؤال نمودی
 باجابت مقرون *

¹ The text reproduced below is that printed in *Majmū'a-yi alwāh-i mubāraka hadrat-i Bahā'u'llāh* (Cairo, 1920/ Rep. Wilmette, Illinois: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1978) pp. 240-248.

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* پرسش نخستین * نخست پرسش یکتای
 یزدان را بچه زبان ورو بکدام سو بنمائیم شایسته است *
 آغاز گفتار پرسش پروردگار است * و این پس
 از شناسائیت * چشم پاك باید تا بشناسد * و زبان
 پاك باید تا بستاید * امروز روهای اهل دانش وینش
 سوی اوست * بلکه سویها را جمله رو برسوی او *
 شیر مرد از خداوند میخواهیم مرده میدان باشی *
 و بتوانائی یزدان بر خیزی و بکوئی * ای دستوران
 کوش از برای شنیدن رازی نیاز آمده و چشم از
 برای دیدار چرا گریزانید * دوست یکتا پدیدار *
 میکوید آنچه را که رستکاری در آنست * ای

(۳۱)

دستوران اگر بوی گلزار دانائی را بیایید جز او
 نخواهید * ودانای یکتارا در جامه تازه بشناسید *
 واز کیتی و کیتی خواهان چشم بردارید و بیاری برخیزید *
 * پرسش دوم * در کیش و آیین بوده *
 امروز کیش یزدان پدیدار * جهاندار آمد و راه
 نمود * کیشش نیکوکاری * و آیینش بردباری * این
 کیش زنده کی پاینده بگردد * و این آیین مردمانرا
 بجهان بی نیازی رساند * این کیش و آیین دارای
 کیشها و آیینهاست * بگیریید و بدارید *
 * پرسش سوم * بامردم روز کار که جدا جدا
 کیشی گرفته اند و هر یک کیش و آیین خویشرا پدشتر
 و بهتر از دیگری دانند چگونه رفتار نمائیم که از دست
 و زبان ایشان در رنج و آزار نباشیم *
 ای شیر مردمان رنجرا در راه حضرت یزدان
 راحت دان * هر دردی در راه او در مانیت بزرگ *
 و هر تلخی شیرین * و هر پستی بلند * اگر مردمان
 بیابند و بدانند جان رایگان در راه این رنج دهند

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این رنج مفتاح کنج است اگر در ظاهر منکر است
 در باطن پسندیده بوده و هست * گفتار ترا پذیر فیم *
 و تصدیق نمودیم چه که مردمان روزگار از روشنائی
 آفتاب داد محرومند * داد را دشمن میدارند * اگر بی
 رنجی طلبی این بیان که از قلم رحمن جاری شده
 قراءت نما * الهی الهی شهید بفر دایتک و وحدایتک
 أسألك يا مالك الأسماء و فاطر السماء بنفوذ كلمتك
 العلیا و اقتدار قلمك الأعلى أن تنصرنی برایات قدرتك
 وقوتك و تحفظنی من شر أعدائك الذین تقضوا
 عهدك و میثاقك انك انت المقتدر القدير *

این ذکر حصنی است متین و لشکر یست مبین
 حفظ نماید و نجات بخشد *

* پرسش چهارم * در نامه های ما مژده داده اند
 شاه بهرام بانسانهای زیاد از برای رهنمائی مردمان
 میآید الی آخر بیانیه *
 ای دوست آنچه در نامه ها مژده داده اند ظاهر
 و هویدا گشت * نشانها از هر شطری نمودار * امروز

یزدان ندامینماید و کل را بمینوی اعظم بشارت
 میدهد * کیتی بانوار ظهورش منور و لکن چشم
 کم یاب * از یکتا خداوند پیمانند بخواه بندگان خود را
 بینائی بخشند * بینائی سبب دانائی و علت نجات
 بوده و هست * دانائی خرد از بینائی بصراست * اگر
 مردمان بچشم خود بنگردند امروز جهانرا بروشنائی
 تازه روشن بینند * بگو خورشید دانائی هویدا * و آفتاب
 بینش پدیدار * بختیار آنکه رسید و دید و شناخت *
 * پرشش بنجم * از پیل صراط و بهشت و دوزخ بوده *
 بیمبران بر استی آمده اند و راست گفته اند
 آنچه را پیک یزدان خبر داده پدیدار شده و میشود *
 عالم بمجازات و مکافات برپا * بهشت و دوزخ را خرد
 و دانائی تصدیق نموده و مینماید چه که وجود این
 دواز برای آن دو لازم * در مقام اول و رتبه اولی
 بهشت رضای حق است * هر نفسی برضای او فائز
 شد او از اهل جنت علیا مذکور و محسوب * و بعد از
 عروج روح فائز میشود با آنچه که آه و خامه از