

## Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet of the Uncompounded Reality (Lawḥ Basīṭ al-Ḥaḳíqa)

A Provisional Translation

Moojan Momen

*Abstract: This paper consists of an introductory survey together with a provisional translation of Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet of the Uncompounded Reality (Lawḥ Basīṭ al-Ḥaḳíqa). The subject of the Tablet is the unresolved conflict in Islam between philosopher-mystics who adhere to the philosophy of existential oneness (waḥdat al-wujúd) and jurists and others who oppose this view regarding it as heresy and blasphemy. Bahá'u'lláh seeks to resolve the issue and bridge the gap between the these two attitudes of mind by showing how both viewpoints can be true when taken within the context of the concept of the Manifestation of God.*

The Tablet known as the *Lawḥ Basīṭ al-Ḥaḳíqa* (Tablet of the Uncompounded Reality) dates from the Akka period. In this Tablet, Bahá'u'lláh deals with one of the issues that has run through the Islamic world from the Middle Ages onwards. This is the controversy between two positions concerning the nature of the relationship between God and His creation. These two positions existed from the earliest days of Islam and eventually became known as *Waḥdat al-Wujúd* (existential unity, oneness of being) and *Waḥdat ash-Shuhúd* (unity in appearance only). The former was the position taken by the followers of Ibn al-'Arabí (d. 638 A.H./1240) and was more common among those inclined towards Sufism and mystical philosophy. The latter was the position commonly taken by

jurists and was given its name by Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindí (971 A.H./1563-1034 A.H. - 1034/1624-5) in the 17th century.

In brief it may be said that those who supported the position of *Wahdat al-Wujúd* maintained that Being is one — it is that which exists. Since existence is also one of the essential attributes of God, then it may be said that all things are subsumed in the one Absolute Reality that we call God. This one Reality has different aspects according to the way that it is viewed.

Those who held to the opposing position of *Wahdat ash-Shuhúd* maintained that God is beyond any conceptualizations that can be made of Him; he is *wará' al-wará thumma wará' al-wará thumma wará' al-wará* (beyond the beyond, then beyond the beyond, and again beyond the beyond)<sup>1</sup>. Hence the mystics' experience of unity or union or any apprehension of God through mystical experience is subjective only and has no objective validity. The unity that mystics claim with God is only an appearance and has no substance.

In Iran, the concept of *wahdat al-wujúd* had a powerful influence especially upon many philosopher-mystics. The most important of these was Ṣadru'd-Dín Shírází, known as Mullá Ṣadrá. It is Mullá Ṣadrá whose dictum "All that which is uncompounded in Its Reality is, by virtue of Its [absolute] Unity, all things" (*kullu ma huwa basítu 'l-ḥaqíqa fa-huwa bi-wahdatihi kullu 'l-ashyá'*) is quoted and commented upon by Bahá'u'lláh in this Tablet. This dictum is one of the cornerstones of Mullá Ṣadrá's philosophy and is explicated in several of his works: *al-Hikmat al-Arshiyyah* (the Wisdom of the Throne)<sup>2</sup>, *al-Mabda wa'l-Mu'ád* (the Origin and the Return)<sup>3</sup>, *al-Mashá'ir fí Ma'rifat Alláh* (the Staging-Posts in the Knowledge of God)<sup>4</sup>, and *al-Hikmat al-muta'áliyya fi'l-Asfar al-'aqliyya al-arba'a* (The Transcendental Wisdom concerning the Four Journeys of the Rational Soul).<sup>5</sup>

In his work *al-Hikmat al-Arshiyyah*, the Wisdom of the Throne, Mullá Ṣadrá takes as his starting point the traditional philosophical concept that all things are composed of quiddity (*mahiyyah*, that which answers the question "what is it?") and being (*wujúd*, that which gives existence to the quiddity). He then goes on to demonstrate that if an entity A has something

B negated of it (i.e. if A is stated to be "not B") and if B is something that itself has being (i.e. is not merely a statement of privation or imperfection, such as "not blue" or "illiterate"), then A cannot be uncompounded in its essential reality since it must be composed of at least two aspects, an aspect by which it is A and an aspect by which it is not B. (These two aspects cannot be identical since that would mean positing that the very essence of A is something privative such that anyone who intellected "A" would also immediately intellect "not B"). Hence the converse of this must also be true, that which is uncompounded in its reality can have nothing that has being negated of it — otherwise it would consist of at least two aspects: an aspect by which it is such (such as A) and an aspect by which it is not some other (such as not B, not C, etc.), and would therefore not be uncompounded in its essential reality. Hence "that which is uncompounded in its reality" must necessarily be "all things".<sup>6</sup> Elsewhere, Mullá Ṣadrá makes it clear that "that which is uncompounded in its reality" is the "necessarily existent (*wájib al-wujúd*)", i.e. God<sup>7</sup>, and this is the definition also given by other writers.<sup>8</sup>

Mullá Ṣadrá's pre-eminence in the field of Iranian Shi'i mystical philosophy (*ḥikmat*) meant that this idea was adopted and commented upon by numerous other philosophers. For our purposes, the most significant of those who commented upon this dictum was the Shaykhí leader, Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsá'í. He severely criticized this dictum of Mullá Ṣadrá because of its implication of existential monism.

Shaykh Aḥmad wrote in several of his works commenting upon this dictum. The most extensive of these critiques was in a commentary that he wrote on Mullá Ṣadrá's work the *Mashá'ir* (composed in 1234/1818-9 in Kirmánsháh). He also deals with this subject in his last major work, his commentary on Mullá Ṣadrá's *Hikmat al-'Arshiyya* (completed in 1236/1820-1 in Kirmánsháh). In the latter, he states that this dictum is erroneous because:

He [Mullá Ṣadrá] has concluded that if one negates something of it and this negation is comprehended in the mind, then this necessitates composition. And we say to him: the uncompounded reality is a pure matter,

not something from which nothing can be negated because your words that "it is something from which nothing can be negated" is similar to your words that "it is something from which something can be negated"; for in both cases there is need for composition. There is need for composition from existent matter and non-existent matter in what you have rejected and there is need for composition from existent matter and existent matter in what you have taken recourse in, and it is that from which nothing can be negated.<sup>9</sup>

This subject also arises in a treatise that Shaykh Aḥmad wrote for Mullá Muḥammad Damaghání in 1232/1816-7, and in a treatise written for several unnamed Sayyids in (date not known)<sup>10</sup>. In the last-named work, Shaykh Aḥmad states that:

When he (Mullá Ṣadrá) says "the uncompounded reality is all things", this expression would suggest that He [God], praised be He, is all accidents (*ḥawadith*), since things are accidents. The error of this statement is clear since accidents are in the realm of contingency (*al-imkán*) and the necessarily [existent], praised be He, is pre-existent (*azal*) and is not in the realm of contingency ...

Shaykh Aḥmad goes on to give several possible meanings of Mullá Ṣadrá's dictum and demonstrates the falseness of each.<sup>11</sup>

The Báb, in a few places, criticizes the doctrine of *wahdat al-wujúd* as it was generally understood among Sufis. He disapproved, in particular, of the concept that God could somehow be considered to be dispersed among created things. In the course of this criticism, He mentions the concept of *basít al-ḥaqíqa*. In His *Risála adh-Dhahabiyya*<sup>12</sup>, the Báb states that:

Most of the Islamic philosophers, the peripatetic philosophers, the followers of Mulla Ṣadrá (*aṣ-Ṣadrá'iyyin*), and the Theosophical philosophers (*al-iláhiyyin*) have erred in their explanations of this station. The signs of the effulgences (*tajalliyát*) of creation were mistaken by them for the countenance of

the Essence [of God]. Thus they went along with erroneous statements concerning the Eternal Archetypes (*a'yan thábita*) being in the Essence [of God] in order to establish His knowledge (praised be He)<sup>13</sup>; and with mention of the Uncompounded Reality in order to establish causality (*'illiyya*) in the Essence [of God]; and with mention of the connection between the Essence [of God] and [His] actions and attributes; and with the mention of the oneness of Being (*waḥdat al-wujúd*) between the Creator (*mújid*) and the one who has gone astray (*al-mafqúd*). All of this is absolute heresy (*shirk maḥḍ*) in the estimation of the family of God, the Imáms of justice, for God has always been the All-Knowing without the existence of anything having form and shape (? — *shay'un bi-mithl ma inna-hu kana shayyár*). Just as He does not need for His being alive the existence of anything other than Him, He also does not need for His knowledge the existence of objects of knowledge. And the Essence [of God] continues to be connected to things. The causation (*'illiyya*) of created things is His handiwork (*san'íhi*) and this is the [Primal] Will, which God has created through itself by itself without any fire from the Essence [of God] touching it. And God has created existent things through it and it continues. The All-High does not speak except through it; and the All-High does not give any indication of its essence (*dhátiyyatihá*). And God has not given any sign of His Essence in [the whole of] creation (*al-imkán*), for His Being (*kaynúnátihi*) sets beings apart from being known, and His Essence (*dhatiyyatihi*) prevents essences from being explained. Verily the relationship of the [Primal] Will to Him is like the relationship of a verse [of scripture] to God. It is a relationship that is conferred upon Creation not upon the Essence [of God], for It is sanctified from the mention of any indications or relationships or evidences or signs or stations or effulgences or breezes relating to It; and that being the case none can know It except Itself. And such expressions as Oneness of Being and the mention of the Uncompounded Reality is witness, in the estimation of the people of the

*covenants (ahl al-'uhúd), to its falsity, for He is the one who there is no-one other than He with Him. How then is it possible to say any words concerning His Being. On the contrary, all signs in the world of Láhút, Jabarút, Malakút and Mulk are possibilities of the hearts and souls [of human beings] and what has occurred to their imaginations. All who describe God, except Himself, have lied and deceived for anything other than Him is not of Him and cannot speak on His level and cannot have existence with Him, even the purest expression of the Oneness of God. And I have set forth proofs in two thousand manuscripts (fi'l-nuskha al-alifayn) in explanation of the secret of the confusion (? - ilhá') of the errors of the words of these men. The beginning of the saying of such words is the passage from Muhyi ad-Dín, may God delay his punishment, such as what he has said in the Fuṣūṣ [al-Hikám]. And this is sheer idolatry (shirk) in the estimation of those who have inner knowledge (ahl al-buṭún).*

And in a letter addressed to Mírzá Muḥammad Sa'íd of Zavárih<sup>14</sup>, the Báb states:

*And with regard to the reply concerning the uncompounded reality, which the philosophers have mentioned in order to assert that there is Being between the Creator and the one who has gone astray, there is no doubt that this is erroneous in the estimation of one who possesses the musk-like fragrance of fair-mindedness.*

Bahá'u'lláh takes a much milder and more accommodating attitude towards the monist ideas in Sufism. In the Baghdad period, He spent some time associating with Sufis in Sulaymaniyya. He also wrote several works in the Sufi style and idiom. Among these were the Seven Valleys (*Haft Vádí*), the Four Valleys (*Chahár Vádí*), and the poem *Qaṣída 'Izz Varqá'iyih* (The Ode of the Dove) which was written in the style of the famous poem *at-Tá'iyya* of the Sufi poet Ibn al-Fárid. Although Bahá'u'lláh wrote less on overtly Sufi themes in later years, the Tablet which is the subject of this paper and

which was revealed in the Akka period is one of those in which He returns to some of these themes.

Given the fact that both Shaykh Aḥmad al-Ahsá'í and the Báb had written on the theme of *Basít al-Ḥaqqíqa*, it was perhaps inevitable that someone among his followers would ask Bahá'u'lláh for His comments on the theme of Mullá Ṣadrá's dictum. It would appear from the text that one of Bahá'u'lláh's followers, named Ḥusayn, had been asked by someone who was a follower of Mullá Ṣadrá to ask for Bahá'u'lláh's comments on the question of *Basít al-Ḥaqqíqa* and this Tablet was revealed in response to the question.

In this Tablet, Bahá'u'lláh again displays his benevolent attitude towards Sufi themes. He refrains from condemning Mullá Ṣadrá's dictum outright, and instead states that those who have condemned this approach have misunderstood it and have taken it too literally.

Bahá'u'lláh first explains the nature of the division among Muslims over Mullá Ṣadrá's dictum and the associated concepts. He brings forward verses from the Qur'an in support of both positions. For those who follow Mullá Ṣadrá's position, which He here calls *Tawḥíd-i-Wujúdi* (existential oneness), Bahá'u'lláh quotes the Qur'anic verse "All things perish save [His] face" (28:8, cf. 55:27) and interprets this to support the position of those who assert that the only reality is the Divine Reality. For those who opposed Mullá Ṣadrá's position, which He here calls *Tawḥíd-i-Shuhúdí* (oneness in appearance only), Bahá'u'lláh quotes the Qur'anic verse "We shall show them Our signs on the horizons and in themselves." (41:53) This He interprets as saying that any evidence of union between the Divinity and creation is only the result of the fact that the signs of God are apparent in all things.

Having defined the two sides of the conflict, Bahá'u'lláh asserts that those who have attacked Mullá Ṣadrá's position have looked only at the literal meaning of his words rather than the underlying meaning. He then goes on to give an interpretation of Mullá Ṣadrá's dictum in terms of the concept of the Manifestation of God. This is one of Bahá'u'lláh's most explicit statements of one of the most interesting and potentially controversial aspects of His doctrine: His assertion

that all of the statements that occur in the scriptures relating to God (including references to His names and attributes, and statements about His actions and commands) refer in reality to the Manifestation of God, since no statement can be made about the Essence of God, which is unknowable.

The Tablet then continues with Bahá'u'lláh's statement that there is no benefit to be gained from disputing such points. Indeed, Bahá'u'lláh asserts that His appearance renders all such disputation secondary. Whichever side of the argument an individual is on, his status with God depends only on whether he accepts or rejects Bahá'u'lláh.

There is not much history available regarding this Tablet. It is from the Akka period and is evidently addressed to an individual named Husayn, but there does not appear to be any information regarding the identity of this individual. In the Tablet the contemporary Iranian philosopher Hájí Mullá Hádí Sabzivári is referred to and condemned for failing to respond to the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. The following material from the manuscript history of the Bahá'í Faith in Ashkhabad by Ustád 'Alí Akbar Banná is of interest in relation to this. In the course of his account of one of the Iranian Bahá'í emigres in Ashkhabad, Ustád Aḥmad Kuláh-dúz Sabzivári, Ustád 'Alí Akbar Banná writes:

Prior to his conversion [to the Bahá'í Faith], he kept company with the mystical philosophers ('urafá). Despite his illiteracy, he sought to acquire the illumination of wisdom (ḥikmat) from being in the presence of Hájí Mullá Hádí, Ḥakím-i Sabzivári. After his acceptance of the Faith, he related: "I went to the afore-mentioned philosopher (ḥakím) and informed him about this matter. The philosopher fell silent and after a pause said:

'Whatsoever has been accepted by the emotions of the heart (*wujdán*) cannot be opposed by explanation

So keep your lips from moving in explanation of these three B of opinion (*dhaháb*), of gold (*dhahab*) and of your religion (*madhhab*)"

Hájí Muḥammad Riḍá the martyr (killed in Ashkhabad in 1889) stated: "One day I went to the door of the house of Hájí Mullá Hádí and gave him a copy of the Tablet of the Uncompounded Reality. I said to him: 'Study this tablet today and I will come tomorrow to take it back.' He took the tablet and I left. The next day I went and took the tablet back, He did not say a word about it."<sup>15</sup>

This historical account would mean that the Tablet of the Uncompounded Reality must be dated to before 1878, the date of the death of Sabzivari. Thus this Tablet dates from the first decade of time in Akka.

The text which is provisionally translated here<sup>16</sup> is that published in the compilation *Alváḥ Mubarakih Haḍrat Bahá'u'lláh: Iqtidárát wa chand lawḥ digár* (usually known as *Iqtidárát*, no date, no of publication, pp. 105-116), the facsimile of a manuscript in the hand-writing of Mishkin-Qalam, dated Rajab A.H. 1310/January 1893. The text of this Tablet has also been published in *Ma'idih Asmání* (vol. 7, pp. 140-7) and by Alexander (Aleksandr) G. Tumanski (d. 1920) in his translation of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Kitabe Akdes*, *Zapiski Imperatorskoy Akademii Nauk S. Petersburg*, 8th series, vol. 3, no. 6, 1899, pp. 61-4. Manuscripts of this Tablet include one in the collection of manuscripts bought from Mr. Dunlop of the British Legation in Tehran by the University of Leiden (Manuscript Or. 4971, section 7, item 1).

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Sirhindi quoted in Burhan Ahmad Faruqi, *The Mujjaddid's Concept of Tawhid*, Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, repr. 1970, p. 81.
- <sup>2</sup> In this paper the text for this work is taken from Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsá'í's commentary on the work (see note 9), the translation is adapted from James Morris, *The Wisdom of the Throne* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).
- <sup>3</sup> In this paper, use has been made of the Persian translation by Ahmad Ardikání (Tihiran: Markaz Nashr Danishgáhi, 1362).

- <sup>4</sup>. The Arabic text used is that found in unnumbered pages at the back of the Persian translation by Ghulam-Husayn Áhangí (Tihiran: Intishárát Mawla, 2nd printing 1361).
- <sup>5</sup>. Qumm: Maktabat al-Mustawfi, 1378/1958, vol.1, p. 116-7
- <sup>6</sup>. Morris, *Wisdom*, pp. 98-9. A similar argument can be found in *al-Mashá'ir*, *Mash'ar* 6 of *Manhaj* 1 (Persian translation, p. 63).
- <sup>7</sup>. See for example, *al-Mabda*, pp. 52-3
- <sup>8</sup>. Muḥammad Sharíf Al-Jurjání, for example, in his dictionary of religious terms, *Kitab al-Ta'rífát* (Beirut: Maktaba Lubnan, 1969) states that *al-basít* can be considered in three ways. The first of these is *al-ḥaqíqí*, which is "that which has no parts (or divisions, *juz'*) to it at all, such as the Creator, exalted be He." (p. 46).
- <sup>9</sup>. Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsá'í *Sharh al-'Arshiyya* vol. 1 (Kirman: Sa'ádat, 1361), pp. 80-1
- <sup>10</sup>. For details of these works and manuscript and published sources for them, see M. Momen, *The Works of Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsá'í* (Bahá'í Studies Bulletin Monograph, no. 1, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1991, nos. 22, 25, and 39, pp. 52, 55-6, 64-5.
- <sup>11</sup>. Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsá'í, *Majmu'a ar-Rasá'il*, vol. 30, (Kirman: Matba'a al-Sa'ádat, second printing, n.d.), pp. 131-2
- <sup>12</sup>. Iranian National Bahá'í Manuscript Collection, vol. 86, pp. 95-6. I am grateful to Stephen Lambden for finding this and the next quotation in this paper.
- <sup>13</sup>. This refers to the assertion that if Knowledge is an essential attribute of God, then the Eternal Archetypes of all created things must be within the Essence of God in order for there to be something that is the object of God's knowledge.
- <sup>14</sup>. Iranian National Bahá'í Manuscript Collection, vol. 69, p. 422-3
- <sup>15</sup>. Ustád 'Alí Akbar Banná, *Tarikh 'Ishqábád* (manuscript in Afnan Library), p. 314-5
- <sup>16</sup>. I am grateful to Keven Locke for some suggested corrections to the translation and to Jack McLean for his suggestions for the improvement of the English text. Others who suggested improvements and corrections to my commentary include John Walbridge, Nima Hazini, and Bijan Masumian

## Lawḥ Basít al-Ḥaqíqa

### Provisional Translation

He is God, exalted be He in Might and Greatness!

Concerning what the questioner has asked regarding the statement of the philosophers (*ḥukamá*) that "the uncompounded reality<sup>1</sup> is all things", say: know that what is intended by "things" in this context (lit. station, *maqám*) is none other than being (*wujúd*) and the perfections (*kamalát*) of being in so far as they are existent [and not privative]<sup>2</sup>; and by "all" is meant the obtainer (*al-wájid*).<sup>3</sup> This "all" contains no plurality and no parts. The meaning is that the uncompounded reality, insofar as it is uncompounded in all respects, is the obtainer and gatherer of all the infinite and endless perfections.<sup>4</sup> As it has been said: "His works are limitless."

In the Persian language, it may be said that what the philosopher means by the word "things" in the afore-mentioned expression is the perfections of being in so far as these are existent [and not privative]; and by the word "all", is meant possession (*dará'í*) that is to say obtaining – the gathering together of all of the limitless perfections, in an uncompounded manner. They have mentioned similar things throughout their discourse on the unity (*tawḥíd*), power (*quwwat*), and intensity (*shiddat*) of existence.

The meaning of the philosopher was not that the Necessarily Existent [God] has become dispersed among (resolved into, lit. dissolved into, *munḥal*) the innumerable existent things. No! Praised be He! Exalted is He above that! Even as the philosophers themselves have stated: "The uncompounded reality is all things, but is not any one thing."

And viewed from another aspect, the lights of the uncompounded reality can be seen in all things. This however is dependent upon the vision of the seer and the discernment of the beholder. A penetrating vision (*abṣar-i ḥadídih*) is able to

see the signs of the Primal Divine Unity in all things, since all things have been and are the places wherein the Divine Names are manifested. The Absolute Reality, however, has been and will continue unceasingly to be sanctified from ascent and descent, from limitations, connections and relationships, while "things" exist and appear in the condition of limitations. Thus it has been said: "The existence of the Necessarily [Existent] would not be in the full perfection of its power and intensity, were it possible for It to disperse Itself into the innumerable existent things, but such a dispersion is not possible." There is much to be said about this statement and if one were to elaborate fully on the meaning of the philosophers, the matter would become lengthy.<sup>5</sup> [107] Because the hearts of the noble are perceived to be subtle and refined, the pen chooses to confine itself to brevity.

Two stations can be observed in the Divine Unity: Existential Oneness (*tawhíd-i wujúdí*), and this is that [station] wherein all things are negated with a "no" and only the Absolute Reality is affirmed. This means the existence of nothing is acknowledged except the Absolute Reality, in the sense that all things, when compared with Its manifestation and remembrance, have been and will continue to be absolute nothingness (*faná-yi maḥḍ*). "All things perish save the [Divine] Face",<sup>6</sup> which means that compared with Its existence, nothing else has the capacity for existence and so no mention of the existence of anything else should be made. It has been said "God was and there was nothing else beside Him. And He is now as He always has been." And yet it can be seen that things exist and have existed. The meaning of these words is that, in His court, nothing has, or has ever had, existence. In the Existential Oneness, "all things" perish and are nothing and the [Divine] "Face"<sup>7</sup>, which is the Absolute Reality, is eternal and unceasing.

[The second station in Divine Unity,] Manifestational Oneness (*tawhíd-i shuhúdí*) is that [station] where the signs of the Primal Divine Unity, the manifestations of Eternity, and the effulgences of the light of Singleness can be observed in all things. Thus in the divine book it is revealed: "We shall show them Our signs on the horizons and in themselves."<sup>8</sup> [108] In this station the effulgences of the signs of the uncompounded reality can be observed and are apparent in all things. The

meaning of the philosopher was not that the Absolute Reality is dispersed among the innumerable existent things. Immeasurably exalted is It from being dispersed in any thing or from being constrained by any limits or from being associated with any other thing in creation. It is and continues to be sanctified from and exalted above all else except Itself. We bear witness that It is one in Its Essence and one in Its attributes. And all things are held in the grasp of the power of Him [God] Who is the sovereign Protector of all the worlds.

In one aspect, all that has been said or will be said refers back to the first assertion, that the glorified and exalted Absolute Reality is unknowable, unattainable, and invisible, and this station has been and will continue to be sanctified from all references and names, and freed from whatever the people of creation may understand of It. The path is barred and the quest denied. For whatever wondrous references and powerful descriptions have appeared from the tongue and pen refer to the sublime Word [of God], the most exalted Pen, the primal Summit, the true Homeland, and the Dawning-place of the manifestation of mercy. This is [109] the source of Divine Unity (*tawhíd*) and the Manifestation of singleness and abstraction. In this station, all of the most beautiful Names [of God] and the most lofty [Divine] Attributes refer to Him (i.e. the manifestation of God), and do not refer to anything beyond Him, for, as has been stated, the Unseen Reality is sanctified from all reference. This locus of the light of Divine Unity, even though outwardly He is given a name and appears to be bound by limitations, is in His inner reality uncompounded (*baṣīṭ*), sanctified from limitations. This uncompounded state is relative and attributive (*iḍáfí wa nisbí*) and not uncompounded in an absolute sense (*min kull al-jihát*). In this station, the meaning is as follows: the Primal Word and the Dawning-place of the light of Primal Oneness is the educator of all things and the possessor of innumerable perfections. For this word in this station, there is an exposition, hidden in the treasures of purity (infallibility, *'iṣmat*) and recorded in the guarded tablet, which it is not appropriate to mention now. Perchance God will produce it. He is the All-Knowing, the All-Informed.

And the objections that have been raised by some to the words of the philosopher are not based on evidence in that the meaning of his words has not been understood. Truly one cannot regard it as sufficient to look to the literal (external) meaning of a statement and then stir up malice. This is except in case of the words [110] of those who are notorious for their unbelief and idolatry. The words of such souls are not worthy of commentary.

The philosophers have been and are of various factions. Some have derived what they say from the books of the prophets. And the first who taught divine wisdom (*ḥikma*) was Idrís, on account of which he was given his name,<sup>9</sup> and he is also called Hermes. He is called by a different name in each language. He has given thorough and convincing expositions in every arena of divine wisdom. And after him Balínús (Apollonius) derived some of the sciences from the Hermetic tablets. Most of the philosophers have derived their philosophical and scientific discoveries from his words and expositions.

Thus this exposition of the philosopher has been and is still capable of numerous praiseworthy and specific interpretations (*ta'wílát*). Some of those who have attained [the Divine Presence], wishing to protect the Cause of God, have outwardly refuted (the words of the philosopher). But this imprisoned servant does not mention anything but that which is good. Furthermore this day is not the day for human beings to occupy themselves with understanding such expositions, for such knowledge and its like has never been and will never be conducive to making human beings self-sufficient (able to do without, detached from all save God, *ghaní*). For example, the philosopher who spoke these words, [111] were he to be alive, and also both they who accepted what he said and those who opposed him over it, all of them would now be in one position: every single one of them who, after the raising of the call of the King of Names from the right hand of the luminous spot, affirmed his belief, is accepted and praiseworthy,<sup>10</sup> and all others are rejected.

How many the souls who considered themselves as being at the highest pinnacle of reality and mystical knowledge to the extent that they considered that what issued forth from their mouths

was the balance by which [the truth of] human utterance should be weighed or the astrolabe with which the calendar of the beginning and the end should be fixed. Despite all this, in the days of the spring-time of the All-Merciful and the blowing of the winds of trials, we did not discover in them either acceptance or constancy. If a soul were today to be omniscient in all the sciences of the world and yet hesitate in affirming his belief (lit. speaking the word "yes"<sup>11</sup>), he would not be mentioned in the Divine Presence and would be accounted among the most ignorant of people. The goal of the religious sciences is to attain knowledge of the Absolute Reality. Any soul who holds back from this most holy and most mighty adornment is recorded in the tablets as being of the dead.

O Husayn! This wronged one declares: words need deeds. Words without deeds are as bees without honey or as trees without fruit.

Consider the philosopher Sabzivári<sup>12</sup> [112]. Among his verses, there is a poem, which conveys the following meaning: "No Moses is alive to hear it, otherwise the chant of 'I verily am God!' exists in every tree [bush]." Such words as these has he spoken and his meaning is that the true knower of God rises to such a station that his eyes perceive the lights of the effulgences of the luminous Source of manifestation (*mujallí*) and his ears discern His call from all things. There is no objection to these words of the philosopher<sup>13</sup>, but, as we have already stated, this is the realm of words. In the realm of deeds, however, it can be seen that although the call of the divine lote-tree has been raised upon the highest spot in creation in clear and unambiguous (*min ghayr ta'wíl*) language and is inviting all beings through the loftiest of summonses, he has paid no heed whatsoever. For had he hearkened, he would have arisen to make mention of it. Either we must say that these were empty words which flowed from his mouth, or that, for fear for his reputation and love of his livelihood (lit. his bread), he remained deprived of this station (of belief) and of testifying to it. Either he understood and concealed [his belief] or he understood and denied [Bahá'u'lláh's claim].

Woe to those who waste [113] their whole lives in trying to establish the truth of their vain imaginings and yet, when the



lights of the Divine Presence are shining forth from the horizon of the name of the Self-Subsisting (*al-Qayyûm*), they remain deprived thereof. The Cause is in God's hands. He grants what He wishes to whomever He wishes, and withholds whatever He desires from whomever He desires. He is to be praised in His doings and obeyed in His judgements. No God is there but He, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.<sup>14</sup>

In these days, the following was revealed in a tablet: How many men, attired with a turban [i.e. learned], have held back and opposed and how many women wearing veils have recognized and accepted and have said "Praise be to Thee, O God of the Worlds!" Thus it is that we have made the most exalted among them to become the most abased, and the most abased to become the most exalted. Verily your Lord is Ruler over whatsoever He wishes.

O Husayn! Say to the questioner: forsake this small pond when the most mighty ocean is before you. Draw near and drink from its waters in the name of your Lord, the Knowing, the All-Informed. By my life! It will cause you to reach a station wherein you will see in the whole world naught but the effulgences of the presence of the Ancient of Days and you will hearken unto the lote-tree which has been elevated upon the knowledge that there is no but He, the Powerful, the Mighty, the Omnipotent.

In this day, it is incumbent upon all souls, when they hear the call from the Dawning-Place of Creation, to leave behind [114] the people of the world and their opinions and arise and say: "Yes,<sup>15</sup> O my Desire!" and then to say: "I obey! O Beloved of the Worlds."

Say: O questioner! Were the sweetness of the wine of the exposition of your Lord to seize you and were you to recognize the wisdom and illumination that is in it, you would forsake this contingent world and arise to assist this wronged exile and would proclaim: "Praise be to the one who has manifested the fluid [waters] as the solid [ice],<sup>16</sup> and the uncompounded [reality] as a circumscribed [creation], and the hidden as the manifest; the one who, were one to behold him in his outward form, one would find him in the form of a man standing before the people of tyranny. Were one to contemplate his inner

reality, however, one would recognize him as lord over all who are in the heavens and earths."

Listen to what the fire is proclaiming from the luminous lote-tree raised upon the crimson spot: "O People! Hasten with all of your hearts to the shore of the Beloved. Thus has the matter been decided and the decree has issued forth from He who is all-powerful and trustworthy."

O questioner! Your words have been mentioned in the Divine Presence<sup>17</sup> in this manifest prison. Thus has been revealed this tablet from the horizon of which shines forth the sun of the benevolence of your Lord the mighty, the all-praised. [115] Know its true worth and value it greatly. This would be best for you, if you are among those who have true knowledge. We ask of God that He confirm you in His Cause and make mention of you and decree for you that which will profit you in this world and the next. He verily answers the prayers of those who call upon Him and He is the most merciful of the merciful.

O servant! Were you to be attracted by the breezes of the utterances of the Lord of Names and were you to seek illumination from the lights of the [Divine] Face<sup>18</sup>, which shine forth from the Dawning-place of eternity, you would turn your face towards the all-highest Horizon.

Say: O Creator of the heavens and Lord of Names! I ask You by Your name through which You have opened the door of meeting with You to Your creatures and have caused the sun of Your bounty to shine forth upon those who are in Your kingdom, that You may cause me to be sincere in Your love, detached from all save You, arising for Your service, looking towards Your Face, and speaking in praise of You. O Lord! assist me in the days of the Manifestation of Your Self and the Dawning-place of Your Cause, such that I may burn away the clouds [that obscure You] by Your grace and favour and may consume the veils [that separate me from You] with the fire of Your love. O Lord! You are strong and I am weak; You are rich [116] and I am poor. I ask You, by the ocean of Your bounty, that You do not cause me to be deprived of Your grace and Your Love. All things bear witness to Your greatness, Your glory, Your power and Your might. Guide and assist me through (lit. take my hand

in the hand of) Your will and save me by Your sovereignty. Write down then for me what You have written down for Your confidants, those who have near access to You and are faithful to Your Covenant and Testament, who soar in the atmosphere of Your will and speak Your praise among Your creatures. Verily You are the Powerful, the Protector, the Lofty, the Mighty, the Generous.<sup>19</sup>

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup>. *Baṣīṭ al-Haḳíqa*. *Baṣīṭ* is here translated as "uncompounded". It has been translated by James Morris as "simple" (*The Wisdom of the Throne*, pp. ). Although this is technically a correct translation in the philosophical sense of the word as something that is uncompounded, I felt that the word "simple" has too many other meanings in common use and would be confusing. The translator of the *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* (p. 61) has translated the term as "elementary". There is also the fact that this word is being used in a genitive construction and not adjectivally (i.e. the Arabic may be rendered literally as "the uncompounded of reality"). The root of the word *baṣīṭ* means "to spread out" or "to stretch out", and in this sense of something spread out, I was tempted to translate the phrase as "the field of reality". This would render the passage "the field of reality is all things" which has a striking resonance with modern physics in the sense that all physical reality is in modern physics considered to consist of electro-magnetic fields in which fluxes occur. This would however, apart from being anachronistic also be a departure from the sense in which the original author Mullá Sadrá intended this passage. His meaning was derived from the philosophical notion that all reality is compounded and that the only uncompounded reality is God.
- <sup>2</sup>. i.e. those perfections that are positive and existent, rather than those which are negative and privative.
- <sup>3</sup>. This is a somewhat unusual use of the word *wájjid*, which derives from the root meaning "to get" or "obtain". According to Sayyid Ja'far Sajjádí, (*Farhang-i Ma'árif-i Islámi*, Tehran, 1373, 3rd vol., p. 2090, citing *Sharḥ-i Kalamát-i Bába Táhir*) *wájjid* is used by Bába Táhir 'Uryán to refer to someone who has emptied himself of all vestige of self and has detached himself from all save God.
- <sup>4</sup>. The basic language of the text changes from Arabic to Persian at this point, although there continue to be numerous Arabic phrases and passages in what follows.
- <sup>5</sup>. These numbers refer to the page numbers in the original text in *Iqtidarát*.

- <sup>6</sup>. Qur'án 28:88; cf. its corollary 55:26-7. Also associated with this concept of the Face or Countenance of God is 2:115, which states that: Wheresoever you turn, there is the Face of God. These verses are taken in the Islamic mystical and metaphysical tradition to mean that when one turns one's face towards (*tawajjuh* - derived from the same Arabic root as *wajh*) God, then everything else in Creation becomes as nothing.
- <sup>7</sup>. Qur'án, see note 5
- <sup>8</sup>. Qur'án 41:53
- <sup>9</sup>. The name Idrís can be considered to derive from the root "d-r-s" which means "to teach".
- <sup>10</sup>. Lit. Attained to the word "*Balá*" (lit. "Yes"). A reference to Qur'án 7:172, where, in the pre-eternal Covenant, to God's question "Am I not your Lord?" The children of Adam are made to reply "Yes (*Balá*).". In other words, Bahá'u'lláh is saying that were Mullá Sadrá together with his supporters and opponents all to be alive in Bahá'u'lláh's day, they would all be in the position of having to face the challenge of Bahá'u'lláh's claim.
- <sup>11</sup>. See note 9
- <sup>12</sup>. Mullá Hádí Sabzivári (d. 1878) the most prominent of the Iranian philosophers of the nineteenth century. An English translation of one of his major works is available *The Metaphysics of Sabzavári* (trans. T. Izutsu and M. Mohaghegh, New York, 1977).
- <sup>13</sup>. Indeed Bahá'u'lláh himself says much the same in one of the prayers for the fast: "...this Revelation - a Revelation the potency of which hath caused every tree to cry out what the Burning Bush had aforetime proclaimed unto Moses, Who conversed with Thee" (*Prayers and Meditations*, no. 85, p. 144).
- <sup>14</sup>. This paragraph is paraphrased and quoted by Bahá'u'lláh in the Words of Paradise (*Kalimát Firdawsiyyih*), *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 61
- <sup>15</sup>. See note 9
- <sup>16</sup>. Cf. Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations*, no. 38, p. 49
- <sup>17</sup>. lit. "before the Face"; a Qur'anic allusion, see note 5
- <sup>18</sup>. Qur'anic reference, see note 5
- <sup>19</sup>. This paper was originally completed 1 August 1995. It was edited on the basis of the suggestions made by the individuals named in note 16 and an additional paragraph drawn from the history of Ustád 'Alí Akbar Banná was added, 18 June 2000. Some slight further modifications were made preparatory to this publication in 2010.

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