

# The *Kiáb-i-Aqdas*: Preamble

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The following is an outline and some notes of the talk I gave at the Association for Bahá'í Studies—Japan Conference held at the Tokyo Bahá'í National Centre in February, 1993. When I had the honour of addressing the Association for Bahá'í Studies Conference in Tokyo, I had received the text of the Most Holy Book only the day before my departure from Canada. A large part of the outline consists of references to the works which I consulted and used, and which are readily available for individual search. Therefore, excerpts are not quoted.

Since that time, the *Kiáb-i-Aqdas* has been officially released and many distinguished scholars have been studying it. I have added to this outline remarks and commentaries made by some of these scholars over the past few months, particularly Ahang Rabbani from Texas, who generously provided me with his study notes on the *Kiáb-i-Aqdas* and specifically on the relationship between the works of the Bab and the *Kiáb-i-Aqdas*; Enayat Rawhani, whose lectures and workshops on the *Kiáb-i-Aqdas* have raised both the excitement and the understanding of the Canadian Bahá'í community for the Most Holy Book, more specifically for its “spirit”.

In the end, this outline should only be seen as a tool, a very inadequate instrument, to help in the study of the *Kiáb-i-Aqdas*. For a more thorough and scholarly approach to the *Kiáb-i-Aqdas*, the Association for Bahá'í Studies for North America will release at a later date the edited proceedings of the Symposium on the *Kiáb-i-Aqdas* held at McGill University in Montreal in June 1993 prior to the 17th Annual Conference on the theme of Spirituality. Presentations were made by Dr. A. Banani (UCLA) who introduced the *Kiáb-i-Aqdas*; Dr. A. Amanat (Yale University) who talked about the *Kiáb-i-Bayán*; Dr. J. Hatcher (University of South Florida), whose paper was entitled “Unsealing the Choice Wine at the Family Reunion”; Professor Martha Schweitz (Seinan Gakuin University, Japan), who brilliantly talked about “The *Kiáb-i-Aqdas*: Bahá'í Law, Legitimacy, and World Order”; and Mr. H. Riazati (Araheim), who depicted “The Cultural Context of the Revelation of the *Kiáb-i-Aqdas*”.

## INTRODUCTION

### 1. From Revelation to Translation

It could be said that the principle of Progressive Revelation applies to the *Kiáb-i-Aqdas* as it was released to the Bahá'ís and to the world progressively following its revelation by Bahá' u'lláh. Thus, a number of steps can be identified.

## 2. Progressive Release

The first attempts at translating the Most Holy Book were made during the life of Bahá'í 'Iláhi but were discouraged by Him so as not to create disunity within the ranks of the Cause still in its infancy.

The establishment of the Lesser Covenant prepared the way for the progressive release of the Book by preparing and strengthening the Bahá'í community.

The first authoritative translation of passages of the *Kiráb-i-Aqdas* was carried out by Shoghi Effendi in 1935. These passages can be found in *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'í 'Iláhi*, sections 37, 56, 70, 71, 72, 98, 105, 155, 159, 165.

The Guardian later explained that an essential prelude to the publication of the *Kiráb-i-Aqdas* would be the release of a synopsis and codification.

In 1956, the Guardian adopted as one of the goals of the Ten Year Crusade, a codification of the laws and ordinances of the *Kiráb-i-Aqdas*. Before his passing, the Guardian worked on this synopsis.

As one of the goals of the Nine Year Plan, the Universal House of Justice decided to complete the synopsis and codification. It was published at Ridván 1973.

In 1986, under the guidance of the Universal House of Justice, translation on the Book was resumed.

The complete authoritative translation of the Mother Book of the Bahá'í Dispensation was released at the end of the Bahá'í Holy Year.

## 3. Further Sources of Study

For an overview of the *Kiráb-i-Aqdas* by Shoghi Effendi, see passages of *God Passes By*: p. 213 to 220.

For a more comprehensive history and analysis of the Book, see Adib Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahá'í 'Iláhi*, vol. 4, chapters 13 to 17, p. 275 to 399.

On the issue of translation, see particularly p. 283 and 284, the explanations from the Universal House of Justice, and on the need for caution and wisdom, see p. 279 and 280.

## THE CONTEXT OF THE REVELATION OF THE KITÁB-I-AQDAS

### 1. Historical Circumstances of the Revelation of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*

See Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 213; A. Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahá'í Ulláh*, vol. 4, p. 275; H. Balyuzi, *Bahá'í Ulláh, the King of Glory*, chap. 38, p. 351-353.

### 2. Previous Dispensations in Relation to the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*

For the Judaic, Christian and Islamic Dispensations, the laws in these Dispensations and their differences with the Bahá'í Dispensation, see Shoghi Effendi p. 213 and Taherzadeh p. 277.

### 3. The Dispensation of the Báb in Relation to the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*

The volume entitled *Selections from the Writings of the Báb* represents only a very small sample of the more than 500,000 verses which, as the Báb attests himself in the Persian *Bayán* (vâhid 6, chapter 11), He revealed during His short ministry.

About the quality of the Writings of the Báb, see Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 22-23.

### The *Qayyumu'l-Asmá*

The first work of the Báb written after His declaration is the *Qayyumu'l-Asmá* (23 May 1844). The Guardian points out in *God Passes By* that the fundamental purpose of this work is to “forecast what the true Joseph (Bahá'í Ulláh) would, in a succeeding Dispensation, endure at the hands of one who was at once His arch-enemy and blood brother.”

There is however a second purpose to the *Qayyumu'l-Asmá*: to assure all believers and seekers of the continuation of the outpouring of divine Grace and to reaffirm the spiritual and moral teachings of past Dispensations.

The third purpose of the *Qayyumu'l-Asmá* is to establish the foundation of the social and devotional laws of His Dispensation. Most of these laws upheld the Qur'anic laws while some others abrogated them. Some were accepted and brought forward by Bahá'í Ulláh in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* while a number of others were abrogated by Bahá'í Ulláh (such as the necessity of Holy War) and some others yet were modified (for a detailed account of the laws and ordinances of the *Qayyumu'l-Asmá* which are of particular interest in a study of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, see appendix A)

## The Persian *Bayán*

This Book (and to a large extent its “condensed” version in Arabic, the Arabic *Bayán*) is the Mother Book of the Dispensation of the Báb. It was revealed in the fortress of Máh-Ku (1848) but includes a part revealed in Shiráz in the presence of Mullá Husayn.

The main purpose of the *Bayán* is to make prophetic announcements about the Manifestation of Bahá’ u’Iláh. The advent of “Him Whom God shall make manifest” is the central feature of the *Bayán* and the Báb makes the acceptance of His Mother Book dependant upon the good pleasure of the One whose advent He is heralding.

Contrary to the *Qayyumu’l-Asmá*, which is Qur’anic in style and reaffirms the basic truths of Islam, the Persian *Bayán* represents a radical break with Islamic law, abrogating many laws and instituting new ones.

The Báb intended the *Bayán* to be composed of 19 váhids (units) of 19 chapters each. However, since the work was abruptly ended in the tenth chapter of the ninth váhid, the Báb promised that “Him Whom God shall make manifest” would complete His work.

Of the laws promulgated in the *Bayán*, 32 have been brought forward by Bahá’ u’Iláh in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (for a detailed list of these 32 laws, see appendix B).

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#### THE SALIENT FEATURES OF THE *KITÁB-I-AQDAS*

1. The “spirit” and “atmosphere” of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, or how to approach the Most Holy Book

##### A. A Love Story

When studying the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, it is essential to recognize that the spirit of love is at the heart of the laws promulgated by Bahá’ u’Iláh for humanity, that these laws have been revealed out of love for humanity. As a result, not only does the spirit of love permeate the Book, but its very language is one which expresses love:

“Observe My commandments for the love of My beauty” (par. 4).

“God hath made My hidden love the key to the Treasure” (par. 15).

“He who attaineth to My love has tithed to a throne of gold, to sit thereon in honour over all the world” (par. 36).

“Burn ye away the veils with fire of My love” (par. 132).

It is essential as well to study the use which Bahá'í'Iláh makes of metaphors to convey the spirit of love (for a general analysis of the use of metaphors in the Bahá'í Revelation, see J. Hatcher, *The Purpose of Physical Reality*, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, 1987). What, indeed, we are invited to, is a love affair with the Covenant, within which the beloved smiles, demonstrates happiness, inhales the "sweet smelling fragrances of His garment", all by following His laws. The metaphors contribute to a close relationship with Bahá'í'Iláh and with God:

O ye peoples of the world! Know assuredly that My commandments are the lamps of My loving providence among My servants, and the keys of My mercy for My creatures. Thus hath it been sent down from the heaven of the Will of your Lord, the Lord of Revelation. Were any man to taste the sweetness of the words which the lips of the All-Merciful have willed to utter, he would, through the treasures of the earth be in his possession, renounce them one and all, that he might vindicate the truth of even one of His commandments, shining above the Dayspring of His bountiful care and loving-kindness. (par. 3)

## B. A Spiritual Navigation

The study of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* can be seen as a navigation, as a spiritual journey. The means and tools of this navigation, in other words the instruments to guide us to reach our final destination, to help us avoid obstacles and dangers, are provided to us by the uninterrupted flow of Divine Guidance which lies at the very heart of the Covenant of Bahá'í'Iláh.

This Divine Guidance can be articulated in three stages:

Stage 1: It is the stage of the Revelation itself and is conceived in itself in the form of guidance. The *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* is guidance by its very nature. The "Questions and Answers" as well as the *Tablets* revealed by Bahá'í'Iláh after the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* are the first tools, or instruments, given by Bahá'í'Iláh Himself, to take us through the Book.

Stage 2: It lies in the Lesser Covenant itself, the appointment of 'Abdu'l-Bahá as the Centre of the Covenant of Bahá'í'Iláh followed by the appointment of Shoghi Effendi as Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith. The Ministry of 'Abdu'l-Bahá followed by the Ministry of the Guardian encompass 65 years of authoritative interpretation at the centre of which lies the *Will and Testament* of 'Abdu'l-Bahá which can well be seen as an addendum to the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*.

Stage 3: Since 1963 and until the coming of the next Manifestation, the Divine Guidance is ensured by the Universal House of Justice which will, according to the needs of human society, legislate wherever the provisions of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* are empowering it to do so.

## 2. The Features of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*

One of the best ways of identifying these features is to go back to the categories delineated in the *Synopsis and Codification of the Laws and Ordinances of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas* released by the Universal House of Justice in 1973.

The two most important have to do with the station of Bahá'í'Iláh (see as well, Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 214) and with the Covenant of Bahá'í'Iláh, the line of authority through 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi, and the Universal House of Justice (see as well, A. Taherzadeh, *The Covenant of Bahá'í'Iláh*, George Ronald, Oxford, 1992).

For a study of the laws and ordinances, one should follow the principle enunciated earlier: the best way of studying the laws and ordinances in their diversity as well as in their unity, is to use the *Synopsis and Codification*, and then to study the letters from the Universal House of Justice as they pertain to laws of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*.

### 3. Auxiliary Issues

Exhortations to the people of the *Bayán*.

The various exhortations to political leaders, and religious leaders, can be studied in relation to the various Tablets written by Bahá'í'Iláh to the Kings, Ecclesiastics and political leaders of His time.

-III-

## OUR ANSWER TO THE BOOK

### 1. That the Laws are the Covenant

Humanity's obedience to the Laws promulgated by Bahá'í'Iláh lies in its response to the Covenant. Accepting the Covenant of Bahá'í'Iláh necessarily means accepting His laws.

However, the response remains voluntary. It is a matter of choice: how we choose to live (obedience or not and consequences of our choice); how we choose to respond to tests and challenges.

Our twin responsibilities are to recognize and obey God (see the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 19; *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'í'Iláh*, p. 330-331; *Tablets of Bahá'í'Iláh*, p. 268).

It is from our attitude which depends the release of divine power (see *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'í'Iláh*, p. 7-9, 245-246; *Tablets of Bahá'í'Iláh*, p. 51 and p. 155).

2. That Obedience is True Liberty

*Choice* is humanity's ultimate expression of freedom, what allows (or not) humanity to overcome its material nature, what allows (or not) humanity to grow spiritually stronger, and thus fulfil its destiny.

Obedience has to do with the relationship between physical and spiritual realities (see J. Hatcher, *The Purpose of Physical Reality*).

That liberty has to do with deeds.

3. That Understanding the Laws is a Matter of Global Vision

See A. Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 286.

Sundry letters from the Universal House of Justice which explain that the laws are progressive in their application (as an example, the main law which has now become binding on the Bahá'ís of the West as it was on the ones of the East, is the Law of the Huqúqu'lláh).

The laws proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh are destined to be progressive, not regressive.

That the laws of Bahá'u'lláh are universal in nature and require a renewed level of consciousness of the interdependence of all nations and all members of the human race.

4. That the Laws are a Matter of Justice

The laws of Bahá'u'lláh have to do with the establishment of order in the world of humanity and are a matter of justice.

One of the corollary of the establishment of order and of justice, is reward and punishment which are themselves a matter of justice.

## CONCLUSION

The *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* has to do with:

1. justice and the oneness of humanity
2. the well-being of humanity
3. the creation of a new world order

“Who so has not recognized this sublime and fundamental verity, and hath failed to attain this most exalted station, the winds of doubt will agitate him, and the sayings of the infidels will distract his soul. He that hath acknowledged this principle will be endowed with the most perfect constancy.” (par. 163)